

Community Development Department Building Division 170 MacGregor Avenue, Room 230 Estes Park, CO (970) 577-3722

Placard Postings







Guidance for Owners and Occupants of Damaged or Destroyed Buildings

Red Cross and/or Emergency Services personnel typically perform a "windshield" assessment of damages immediately following a fire.

After the "windshield" assessment, a safety evaluation team conducts a "rapid evaluation" of damaged properties.

Typically, the rapid evaluation team includes a building inspector who will post structures with one of three placards which indicate the status of the safety evaluation.

Rapid evaluations require only 10 to 30 minutes for each property. The building inspector's responsibility is to determine quickly if a building is safe enough to occupy, and if not, to decide what restrictions to place on its use or entry.

Due to the nature of the rapid evaluation, in most cases the safety evaluation is limited to inspecting only the exterior of the building. If a severe interior problem is brought to the attention of the rapid evaluation team or the structure cannot be adequately viewed from the exterior, an interior evaluation may be conducted.

If a structure was deemed to have no significant damage or was completely destroyed in a disaster, a placard may not have been posted on site. Call the Estes Park Building Division for more information at (970) 577-3722.

What Do the Placards Mean?

Red Posting: If the damage is severe, the posting most likely to be used is a red UNSAFE placard. This sign indicates it is unsafe to occupy or enter the building for any reason. There is also a small chance that an otherwise safe building could be correctly posted as unsafe when parts of an adjoining building could fall onto that building. Even when a building can be entered for inspection, it is still possible that internal damage could pose dangers requiring an unsafe posting.

A "red tag" posting does not automatically mean the property has been condemned or will require demolition. Demolition may eventually be the appropriate action for an owner to take if repairs are too expensive or a qualified structural engineer deems the structure unrepairable.

If a structure was completely destroyed in a disaster, a placard may not have been posted on site. Call the Estes Park Building Division for more information at (970) 577-3722.

Yellow Posting: An intermediate posting called Restricted Use is used to address situations in which a clearly unsafe condition does not exist, but the type of damage prevents unrestricted occupancy. If a safety evaluation reveals damage of a nature that allows safe entry into a building or portion thereof, but would not permit its continued use on a permanent basis, a yellow RESTRICTED USE placard will normally be used. This posting may also apply when a Rapid Evaluation team cannot make a definite determination about the safety of a building. This can occur, for example, when access inside a building is not provided at the time of the evaluation or when finish materials prevent viewing structural members.

Often, entry is limited to occupants or owners so they can retrieve property or to contractors so necessary repairs can be made.

No Restrictions: Where damage is insignificant or readily repairable and does not pose any significant safety hazard, the proper posting will be a green INSPECTED placard. This posting is intended only to inform occupants that the building may be safely occupied. It does not imply that existing damage should be ignored or that repairs are not necessary. If you have evidence that damage to your building is significant, in spite of the green INSPECTED placard, you should call the Estes Park Building Division (577-3722) to schedule a re-evaluation of the initial posting. For example, there might be interior damage that the evaluation team did not see.

If a structure has no damage, a placard may not have been posted on site. Check with your local authorities before re-occupying the structure to confirm it is safe to return. There may be area road, gasline or electrical issues preventing safe re-entry.

If you return to your property and find a posting placard that does not adequately explain the limits of entry or use, you should contact the Estes Park Building Division at (970) 577-3722 for more specific information before entering the building.

Steps to Take to Ensure Damage is Properly Repaired

Contractors: In the aftermath of disasters in which large numbers of buildings are damaged or destroyed, there are likely to be opportunists posing as legitimate contractors willing to assist you in making needed repairs. The best way to avoid these unscrupulous or illegal operations is to ask for proof of both a current Estes Park Contractor license or Colorado State-issued license and a certificate of liability insurance. Although this evidence cannot necessarily ensure top quality workmanship, it certainly will eliminate other problems that can result from using the services of either uninsured or unlicensed individuals.

Prior to signing any contract to perform repairs, be sure that it contains a complete description of the scope of work and states that a building permit will be obtained. Contractors often require that a percentage of the full contract be paid prior to commencing work, but it is generally neither necessary nor prudent to pay the entire amount in advance or make final payment until the building receives final inspection approval.

Check with the Estes Park Community Development Department for repair, rebuilding and permit information for your specific location and extent of damage. Once you have obtained this information and understand what is required, you can then begin the process of hiring, as necessary, an architect, contractor or engineer.

An engineering geologist may also be needed when a building site has experienced scour or erosion or when the stability of a foundation is in question.

Most architects, contractors and engineers belong to either a regional or state association that can provide names, phone numbers and perhaps some information on the type of work in which their members specialize. The next task is to locate, contact and choose the various types of construction services you may need. The Estes Park Building Division has a list of licensed contractors in Larimer County; however, we cannot offer recommendations for any specific company. Recommendations are best sought from other individuals, family, friends or neighbors who have recently used the services of the type of professional you are seeking.

If you are attempting to make repairs or rebuild on your own with the help of contractors, you will still need a building permit and must request the required inspections for the work. Certain minor cosmetic work like replacing insulation, drywall, carpet, etc. may be exempted, but other repairs like fixing chimneys or repairing any damaged structural members will need a permit. While this may seem bothersome, it will prevent challenges as to the adequacy or the work when a property is sold.

Preparations for Securing Disaster Assistance

The details, limitations and eligibility requirements for various types of federal, state or local aid cannot be specifically listed in this document because they are subject to change and are often unique to the circumstances of the situation. The best source for current information on these subjects will be the locally established disaster center or the local emergency management agency.

Your first steps should be to contact the claims office of your insurance company to determine if your loss is covered. You may also be eligible to make a claim for federal or state assistance to cover uninsured losses or deductibles that may apply to your coverage. Whether or not insurance coverage applies to your losses, you should document all visible damage with photographs and a narrative of what each shows. Also keep a record of the nature and extent of any emergency repairs made by yourself or others immediately after the event. The importance of such documentation cannot be overstressed because the full amount of any insurance settlement or financial assistance that may be available in the form of low-interest loans and, occasionally, grants will require significant proof regarding both damage and repairs.

The information in this handout is, in part, a reprint of Appendix E of ATC-45 Field Manual: Safety Evaluation of Buildings. This handout is intended only as an information guide. The information may not be complete and is subject to change. Please contact the Larimer County Building Division at (970) 577-3722 for further information.